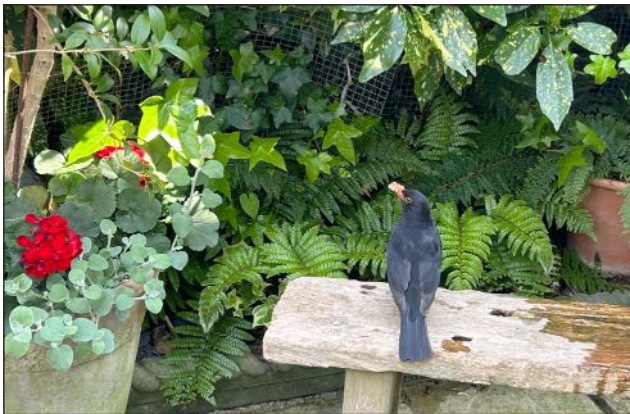


The Driftwood Garden Diary

with Geoff Stonebanks



Euphorbia cyparissias



A visiting blackbird



Blueiris

Stunning blue irises and gardens to visit in Sussex this weekend

NOT long now until the longest day and hopefully a month of beautiful weather!

Just over four weeks on from my knee surgery, I'm extremely pleased to say things are going well and I am becoming much more mobile. I have been extremely lucky with virtually no pain from start to finish, just discomfort and a definite lack of sleep!

The stunning blue iris in my beach garden have looked absolutely gorgeous in recent weeks as you can see. To successfully grow blue iris, you need to select a sunny location with well-drained soil. That is certainly the case with mine as they are in gravel on chalk in full sunshine all day. The rhizomes need to be planted shallowly and regularly watered during the establishment period. Once established, most iris are drought-tolerant but appreciate regular watering during dry periods. It's best to remove spent blooms regularly to encourage new blooms and prevent seed formation. After flowering, you can cut back the flower stalks to the base of the plant and divide iris clumps every three to five years to prevent overcrowding and promote healthy growth. Mine were a gift from a friend many years ago and have reliably flowered every year since.

It's a very busy weekend for garden openings with the National Garden Scheme and here are just a few you could visit with the full list available on their website at www.ngs.org.uk

In Ovingdean, Skyscape at 46 Ainsworth Avenue, opens both days this weekend from 1pm to 5pm with entry £5. This 250ft south facing rear garden is on a sloping site with fantastic views of the South Downs and the sea and has been created over the past 12 years. Comprising a mixture of orchard, flower beds, wildlife ponds and planting with bees and wildlife in mind along with tea and cakes and plants for sale.

Tomorrow, Sunday, there are six fabulous gardens to see as part of the Seaford gardens north trail, which takes place between midday and 5pm in the town. Combined

entry to all gardens is £8 and tickets and maps can be picked up at each plot, please check the web site for full details of all gardens. There are three gardens opening in Firlie Road, Madehurst at 67, Cosy Cottage at 69 and Whitehouse, 130. In addition, numbers 5 and 101 Clementine Avenue, and 129 Princess Drive.

Tomorrow also there are a pair of pretty gardens in Eastbourne, both fairly close to each other, open from 2pm to 5pm with combined entry of £4. 51 Carlisle Road, close to the Congress Theatre is a secluded, award-winning, 75 feet x 65 feet garden with glorious early summer colour from an abundance of old roses, perennials, mixed beds and diverse planting. There is a small pond and areas for plants that love shade or sun. At 12 Granville Road is Chelmsford Lodge. This ¾ acre garden was begun in 1994 and has developed each year.

It was once a former prep-school playing field and a neglected garden. It now features lawns with herbaceous beds, mature and unusual trees.

Another pretty plant in my garden at the moment is the euphorbia cyparissias which bears sulphur-yellow flowers in contrast with needle-like, blue-green foliage. Growing to a height of just 30cm, it's perfect for using as ground cover, even in dry shade. Grown best in moist but well-drained soil in full sun to shade. Remove faded flowers after blooming but always wear gloves when working with spurges, as the milky sap is a skin irritant and can damage your eyes. The plant is known for attracting beneficial insects and other pollinators.

It has nectar/pollen rich flowers. A pretty succulent that spends all the winter inside as a houseplant, but gets let out in the summer is Aloe Zebrina, a stemless evergreen succulent about 30cm tall, with rosettes of linear, pointed, fleshy dark green leaves with ridged leaf surfaces and edged with saw-like bright orange spikes. Many branched panicles to 1.5m tall of cylindrical red or orange-red flowers are produced in spring. The small one pictured was a baby from my main plant, which is kept

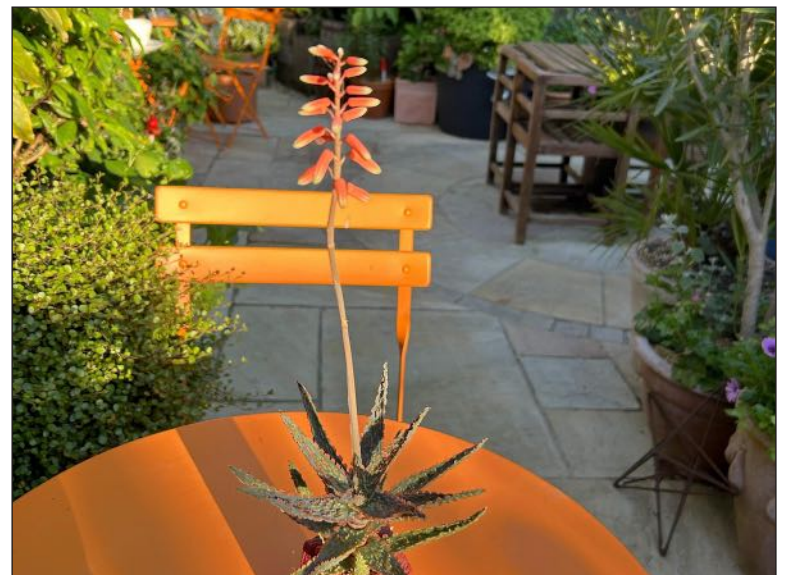


Geoff and irises

on the bathroom windowsill. It looks rather spectacular, flowering and sitting on the orange table in the garden!

This week sees the first few visitors to my garden, those that had pre-booked before I decided to delay opening due to my knee surgery! That said there have been many feathered visitors this year! I reckon we have seen many more birds descend on the garden with quite a few nesting in the tall boundary hedges! A pair of pigeons have a nest in a tall bay at the top of the garden and there seem to be endless friendly blackbirds like the one pictured.

Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or book a visit to see Driftwood between 16th June and 3rd August, by arrangement, by emailing visitdriftwood@gmail.com



Aloe Zebrina